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Cutting Through the Magnetic Tape: Collaborative Preservation of Endangered Videos

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Project Overview



The Saline Area Historical Society is home to a collection of oral histories recorded on several outdated formats. Recorded over the course of 30 years, the collection is a vital part of Saline’s local history.

During this time, the collection has been stored in the basement of the historic Rentschler Farm Museum. These conditions have been less than ideal, causing great concern for the collection’s safety. Having had experience digitizing at-risk collections, the Library Mini-Grant gave me the resources necessary for rescuing these assets. I was still working with a small budget, so this project posed many unique, real-world problems to overcome.



Project Outcomes

- Tapes digitized
- Creation of digitization guidelines
- Creation of inventory system
- Establish long-term storage

There are many institutions, big and small, struggling to deal with their audiovisual collections. This is usually due to a lack of funding and technical knowledge. The main goal of this project was to establish a template for preserving media, given a shoestring budget. I hope that other students seek to develop projects of their own as there are many more collections requiring attention.

Project Impact

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The collection consists of roughly 130 items. Included are oral histories and original recordings of historic Saline, recorded on VHS, audio cassette, hi8 tape, open-reel audiotape and 16mm film.



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Assessing the Collection



Because the Society had no formal means of cataloging items, I developed a means of inventorying assets and tracking metadata. Understanding your collection is crucial for discovering its value and in addressing its immediate needs. I was lucky to have people with first-hand knowledge of the collection assisting me with the creation of metadata, showing that resources can be both physical and intellectual.

Digitization Goals

- Create “digital surrogate” of assets
- Establish project workflow
- Provide in-depth metadata for assets



Digitization was performed by myself within the University’s Duderstadt Center. Many cultural institutions rely on vendor digitization of assets, as the equipment necessary to do so is becoming exceedingly difficult to come by. Although I had experience in similar settings, the knowledgeable staff at the Duderstadt was crucial for completing my project.

Digitizing the Collection